

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
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FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6611
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY BAMAKO
AMEMBASSY DAKAR
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
AMEMBASSY PARIS

S E C R E T RABAT 5347

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, FR, SS, AG
SUBJ: FRENCH EMBASSY VIEWS ON MAURITANIAN/SAHARAN SITUATION

REF: PARIS 28629 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY. FRENCH EMBOFF SHARED HIS IN-DEPTH PERSONAL ANALYSIS OF CURRENT STATE OF PLAY IN MOROCCAN/ALGERIAN/MAURITANIAN MANEUVERING. HE SAID THE MOROCCANS DIGGING IN HEELS ON DIPLOMATIC FRONT, AS REFLECTED IN HASSAN'S AUG 20 SPEECH. NO MOVEMENT SEEMED LIKELY FOR THE MOMENT, ALTHOUGH NO ONE REALLY KNEW WHAT THE KING WOULD DO. POLISARIO WAS ASSUMING DE FACTO CONTROL OF MAURITANIAN-ADMINISTERED SAHARA. MEANWHILE, MILITARY ACTIVITY AGAINST MOROCCAN SAHARA HAS INCREASED MARKEDLY WITH MOROCCANS APPARENTLY SUFFERING IMPORTANT LOSSES. END SUMMARY

2. ACTING FRENCH POLCOUNS ECHOED QUAI'S PESSIMISM (REFTEL) IN CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFF AUGUST 29 ON LIKELIHOOD OF PROGRESS IN
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NEAR FUTURE IN MOROCCAN-ALGERIAN CONTACTS. HASSAN IN HIS AUGUST 20 SPEECH (RABAT 5102 AND 5152) HAD CLOSED THE DOOR "FOR THE TIME BEING" ON ANY MOVEMENT ON THE DIPLOMATIC FRONT. NO FURTHER PARIS CONTACTS WERE SLATED. MEANWHILE, THE MOROCCANS WERE IN A DIFFICULT SITUATION. THEY HAD IN EFFECT LOST A MAJOR ELEMENT OF THEIR NEGOTIATING POSITION AS THE NEW MAURITANIAN LEADERS SET OUT TO SEEK PEACE, APPARENTLY AT ANY PRICE. THE KING'S SPEECH

HAD BEEN DESIGNED TO CALM THE DEEP CONCERN HERE OVER THE EROSION OF MOROCCO'S MILITARY AND DIPLOMATIC POSITIONS. EVEN THE MARUITANIAN/POLISARIO CONFEDERATION IDEA SEEMED EXCLUDED AT LEAST FOR THE MOMENT.

3. IN MAURITANIA, HE SAID THE POLISARIO WAS BUSILY INSTALLING ITSELF ON THE GROUND WITHOUT ANY OPPOSITON FROM MAURITAINAN FORCES. INDEED, THERE WERE AMPLE SIGNS OF FRATERNIZATION WITH MAURITAINAN FORCES. MOST SIGNIFICANTLY, POLISARIO HAD PHYSICALLY INSTALLED ITSELF IN ALL SECTORS OF THE MAURITANIAN PORITON OF THE WESTERN SAHARA EXCEPT DAKHLA. FROM THESE BASES, THEY WERE MOUNTING ATTACKS ON THE MOROCCAN-OCCUPIED SAHARA, INCLUDING A SERIOUS ATTACK A FEW DAYS AGO ON BEN ENZARAN. THE FRENCH SOURCE SAID THAT GOM HAD COUNTERED THE BEN ENZARAN ASSAULT WITH AIR AND HAD MET WITH SAM-7 FIRE. IN REPLY TO EMBOFF'S QUESTION, THE FRENCH SOURCE SAID THAT MOROCCANS HAD TOLD THE FRENCH THAT THEY HAD EMPLOYED F-5'S BASED IN EL AYOUN IN THIS ACTION. HE ADDED THAT THE F-5'S IN NOUADHIBOU HAD BEEN MOVED TO EL AYOUN. (WE HAVE NO INDEPENDENT INFORMATION ON THE REPORTED BEN ENZAREN ACTION BUT DO HAVE SEVERAL INDICATIONS THAT F-5S ARE STILL IN THE SAHARA.) IN A SEPARATE BUT EQUALLY SIGNIFICANT MILITARY GESTURE, A LARGE POLISARIO FORCE HAD ATTACHED AND BADLY MAULED A MOROCCAN GARRISON IN THE REGION OF EL AYOUN SOON AFTER THE KING'S SPEECH.

4. THE UPSHOT WAS THAT THE GOM WOULD LIKELY BE FACED WITH THE
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FOLLOWING UNPLEASANT DE FACTO SITUATION AS TIME PASSED: THE MAURITANIANS WOULD SEEK TO PRESERVE THE CEASEFIRE IN MAURITANIA; THE POLISARIO WOULD EFFECTIVELY OCCUPY THE MAURITANIAN-ADMINISTERED PORTION OF THE SAHARA; AND THE MOROCCANS WOULD CONTINUE TO BE HARD-PRESSED TO DEFEND THEIR OWN PORTION OF THE SAHARA AS POLIARIO MOUNTED INCREASING ATTACKS ON GOM FORCES. INDEED, IT WAS THIS ELEMENT WHICH POSED THE GREATEST DANGER TO AN INADVERTANT ESCALATION. A MOROCCAN TAKEOVER OF MAURITANIA OR REVERSAL OF THE SALEK REGIME SEEMED OUT OF THE QUESTION AND IT WAS DOUBTFUL THAT THE GOM COULD CONTROL THE ENTIRE SAHARA SHOULD THEY TRY IT. MEANWHILE, THE ALGERIANS WOULD PROBABLY BE CAREFUL TO AVOID PROVOKING AN ALL-OUT CONFLICT WITH MOROCCO, ALTHOUGH INCIDENTS IN THE MOROCCAN SHARA WOULD CONTINUE. AT THE SAME TIME, PRESSURE WOULD BE MAINTAINED ON MAURITANIA TO CONTINUE ITS WITHDRAWAL FROM THE WAR. HE SPECULATED THAT THE CEASEFIRE IN MAURITANIA WOULD PROBABLY HOLD UNLESS POLISARIO MOMENTARILY LIFTED IT TO KEEP THE MAURITANIANS IN LINE.

5. IN THIS SITUATION, THE QUESTION WAS WHETHER THE GOM WOULD SEEK A COMPROMISE SOLUTION BEFORE THE SITUATION WORSENEED FURTHER FROM ITS POINT OF VIEW. NO ONE REALLY KNEW WHAT THE KING WOULD DO. WHILE THE FRENCH OFFICIAL AGREED THAT CREATION

OF A MINI-STATE WAS PROBLEMATIC FOR THE REGION, HE REMARKED THAT IT MIGHT END UP BEING THE ONLY WAY OUT. HE NOTED THAT AN IMPORTANT UNKNOWN WITH REGARD TO POLISARIO STRATEGY WAS WHETHER NOUAKCHOTT MIGHT NOT BE POLISARIO'S REAL OBJECTIVE. IRONICALLY, SUCCESS ON THIS SCORE MIGHT, UNDER CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES, RESOLVE THE MOROCCAN OBJECTIONS REGARDING A POLISARIO ENTITY TO THE SOUTH.

6. ALTHOUGH MALIAN PRESIDENT COL MOUSSA TRAORE WAS EXPECTED TO VISIT RABAT IN COMING DAYS, FRENCH EMBOFF TENDED TO DISMISS ANY POSITIVE POTENTIAL FROM THIS VISIT. HE OBSERVED THAT MALI'S POLICY THROUGHOUT HAD BEEN TO SEEK TO SEPARATE MOROCCO FROM MAURITANIA.

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